

# PROPOSAL

**To** : Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission

**From** : Measurements and Outcomes Technical Resource Group

**Date** : April 23, 2008

**Subject** : Evaluation: Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)

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## **BACKGROUND:**

The landmark MHSA legislation requires a competent evaluation of the administration and services provided under the Act. It must be highly credible to those in California and the rest of the country who will be looking at it closely and critically as a model to replicate. The evaluation should include at least the following characteristics, widely agreed on by experts in the field as hallmarks of effective evaluation:

- Exhibits integrity and professionalism
- Is valid and reliable; uses accepted social science research methodologies
- Includes and is responsive to the interests and values of stakeholders, communities and society
- Demonstrates cultural competence; uses appropriate strategies and skills to work with diverse groups
- Contributes to the development of knowledge and competence, including improving effectiveness and efficiency of programs and systems
- Identifies both what is working well and what is not
- Includes a carefully designed and functional system for collecting, organizing, maintaining, analyzing and utilizing meaningful information
- Produces timely, consistent, relevant data reports and disseminates them widely
- Is methodologically sound and impervious to vested interests
- To the degree possible, utilizes existing information to minimize the burden of data collection on service providers.

Of critical importance is the need for the overarching MHSA evaluation to accurately depict the extent to which the objectives of the MHSA have been accomplished. The analysis must be credible, meaningful, and specify the outcomes in understandable terms. The analysis must also include and synthesize the results of the multiple efforts occurring to evaluate outcomes of various parts of the MHSA. Mental health stakeholders need to feel certain that the parties responsible for designing and conducting this evaluation have the requisite expertise and are free from any conflicts of interest. Large sums of taxpayer dollars have been earmarked for mental health transformation and accurate, non-biased results are required.

In order to assure that this is the case, the evaluation contractor retained by the OAC will draw on the analytical and data expertise of the entities authorized to implement the Act, as well as the specific expertise that exists within the resources of the contractor. The evaluation contractor will have the overall responsibility, under the direction of the OAC, to develop the desired outcomes measures necessary to produce the overarching evaluation of the MHSA. It is our belief, that the overarching evaluation must be developed by an objective third party with no vested interest in the outcomes or the success criteria that are envisioned by the Act itself. It is anticipated that the evaluator will seek the advice of the other major parties in order to simplify data reporting and remove duplicative data collection.

In acknowledgement of the fact that the MHSA assigns multiple responsibilities to the Department of Mental health, Planning council, OAC and the counties, it is recommended that the OAC play the lead role to move the evaluation study forward. Since there is an urgent need to proceed with the overarching evaluation efforts, contractors should work closely with the four major players, to assure that data required is available, not duplicative and necessary to achieving the evaluation report.

The MHSA evaluation needs to include periodic data collection in order to provide long-term perspectives on effects and outcomes. Since time is of the essence, capturing mental health information at key data points is essential. The MHSA components should be integrated and evaluated together, since all components (CSS, PEI, etc.) impact one another and transformation needs to occur across all levels. The evaluation contractor is expected to work with the four key entities, as well as with mental health clients, family members, representatives of unserved and underserved communities, service providers and other stakeholders in order to understand and incorporate diverse perspectives on the MHSA and its evaluation. As part of its overarching responsibility for oversight and accountability, the MHSOAC must take the lead role in making certain the evaluation is timely and methodologically sound in its exercise of its oversight responsibility.

Selecting an evaluation contractor and initiating a comprehensive evaluation process are long overdue. However, nothing in the designation of an independent entity detracts from the ability of the four key players to conduct their own specific MHSA responsibilities. For example, DMH has significant responsibility for monitoring expenditures and ensuring compliance with regulations. The statewide evaluation will not preclude counties from conducting their own studies to assess their own performance. Also, the MHPC can continue to carry out its mandated responsibilities for evaluation without conflict with the statewide evaluation of the MHSA.

Proper accountability will ensure that counties expend funds in a manner that is in compliance with state requirements and is consistent with what is in their approved plans. The following restriction is noted in Welfare and Institutions Code Section 5891: "funds shall not be used to supplant existing state or county funds utilized to provide mental health services." The evaluation contractor will need to assess the statewide funding practices to ensure alignment with the MHSA provisions and guidelines.

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The evaluation should be governed by the overarching need to recognize the importance of using methods and measurements that are consistent with the provisions of the MHSA and are meaningful and relevant to consumers, family members and others.

### **IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS:**

The following are the critical next steps:

- Evaluation Concept Development
- Presentation to Outcomes and Measurements Technical Resource Group
- OMTRG Concept Approval
- MHSOAC Concept Review
- MHSOAC Concurrence on Roles and Responsibilities
- MHSOAC Concept Approval
- External Evaluation Agreement: MHSOAC/MHD/MHPC/County Concurrence
- Funding Identification
- Attain Funding
- Evaluation Report

### **DELIVERABLES:**

- To be developed in concert with OAC and MOTRG

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

As funding is identified, the OAC will move to contract with a competent and appropriate contractor – which assures credibility, objectivity and an expedited evaluation.